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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: CHINA'S "ANTI-SECESSION LAW"

1. Summary: Major Chinese-language newspapers in Taiwan continued to report on China's "anti-secession law" March 11 by focusing on President Chen Shui-bian's articulation of gratitude to Washington for its concern about the legislation and for Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's comments on it. The centrist "China Times" printed a banner headline on page two that said "Bian thanks the United States for [its] grave concern over the anti-secession law." The sub-headline adds: "[President Chen] also thanks [President George W.] Bush for his opposition to the European Union's [proposal] to lift its arms embargo against China." A second story on page two of the "China Times" is headlined "[Condoleezza] Rice: anti-secession law is not helpful with regard to the cross-strait situation." The page two headline of the pro-independence "Taiwan Daily" also read: "Bian thanks Bush for his opposition to European Union's Arms Shipment to China." Almost all the newspapers in Taiwan reported in their inside pages that the DPP will hold a mass rally in Taipei March 26 to protest China's "anti-secession law."

2. The editorial of the pro-independence "Liberty Times" urged the Chen Shui-bian administration to put aside its joint statement with PFP Chairman James Soong and join in the mass rally scheduled for March 26 to protest China's "anti-secession law." The limited-circulation, pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" called on Beijing to respect the views of the international community and withdraw the "anti-secession law" from further consideration. A news analysis of the centrist "China Times" noted that Chen's articulation of gratitude to the United States has clearly demonstrated his administration's current strategy of "taking no action to curb [China's] action" in response to China's "anti-secession law." A pro-unification "United Daily News" editorial urged President Chen to ponder on whether he needs to join the mass rally scheduled for March 26 to "counter-react" to China's "anti-secession law." End summary.

A) "The Joint Statement [Announced by] Chen Shui-bian and James Soong Should Be Put aside; Both the Ruling and Opposition Parties Should Join the [March 26] Rally Together to Protect Taiwan"

The pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 800,000] editorialized (3/11):

". [I]t is easier to tell that the joint statement released by [President] Chen and [PFP Chairman] James Soong signifies a victory for Soong in embracing the one China principle, while it indicates a failure for Chen to defend Taiwan's sovereignty. Neither Chen's Five Nos pledge nor the Chen-Soong joint statement has effectively defended Taiwan's sovereignty; instead, they have offered a handle for China to use to threaten Taiwan and to legitimately enact an 'anti-secession law.' To put it more bluntly, the joint statement between Chen and Soong will do more harm than the Five Nos pledge in killing Taiwan's chance of survival. Now the DPP, spurred by the 'anti-secession law' which has endorsed [China's] use of force against Taiwan, acts as if it has just woken up from a long sleep and said it wants to host a mass rally for peace and democracy and to protect Taiwan. We support such an idea and call on President Chen and both the ruling and opposition parties to stand up and join hands in defending Taiwan's sovereignty. Only by doing so can we really achieve the goal of 'protecting Taiwan.'"

B) "Parties Can Show Colors in March"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" [circulation: 20,000] editorialized (3/11):

". The tone of the march and whether President Chen Shui-bian or other senior officials of the Taiwan government attend will depend on whether the PRC rams the law through the National People's Congress on March 14 in the face of intensifying opposition from the international community.

"Senior officials from the United States, European Union and Japan have already expressed serious concern and opposition to any unilateral change to the Taiwan Strait status quo and attempts to resolve the cross-Strait conundrum by 'non-peaceful means,' with one senior U.S. diplomat directly calling the anti-secession bill to be 'a wrong idea.'

"We hope Beijing will decide to respect the views of the world community and withdraw the anti-secession law from further consideration and, preferably, file it in a convenient trash can, since its enactment will inevitably open a Pandora's box full of intended and unintended consequences, most of which will not be favorable to peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait or to the welfare of the people on either side.

"But we agree that the Taiwan people cannot sit in silence if Beijing ignores the well-intentioned advice of the world community. Indeed, a 500,000-person protest march is a relatively mild manifestation of opposition to such an onerous action. ."

C) "The Small Wrestling against the Big; Chen Shui-bian Administration Adopts No Action to Curb [China's] Action"

Journalist Lin Shu-ling noted in a news analysis in the centrist, pro-status quo "China Times" [circulation: 600,000]:

"Beijing originally planned to enact the 'anti-secession law' in order to target Taiwan, but now the law has turned out to be a focus of intense wrestling between the United States and China. President Chen Shui-bian finally responded [to China's 'anti-secession law'] after a few days of silence. While expressing his gratitude to the United States, Chen has clearly demonstrated his administration's strategy for the current situation. 'To adopt no action in order to curb [China's] action' has, without doubt, become the most important model for Taiwan's national security agencies in handling regional issues. .

"After all, even though Taiwan is a victim of the anti-secession law, those who really possesses the strength to turn the tables are big countries like the United States and Japan. Before the situation is finally settled and in order not to complicate the issue, the Presidential Office declined to say whether President Chen will also take to the streets. But the back and forth arguments against the anti-secession law recently were in fact a test for the tacit cooperation between Taipei, Washington and Tokyo with regard to their security alliance."

D) "Reaction and Counter-reaction: Rulers Must Not Get Caught in Vicious Cycles"

The conservative, pro-unification "United Daily News" commented in an editorial [circulation: 600,000] (3/11):

"Beijing's writing of the 'anti-secession law,' no matter from which perspective it is judged, is a great pity for cross-Strait relations. But it is also a fact that the immediate cause for Beijing's enactment of such a law is because 'over the recent period of time, the Taiwan authorities have accelerated the pace in promoting Taiwan independence activities.' As a result, [our] ruler should make a sensible . choice between reviewing his responsibility for 'making a bad policy that brings insults to his country' and getting half a million people to join in a mass rally.

"Our ruler used to repeatedly announce that he would rewrite Taiwan's constitution and abandon his Five Nos pledge, or he would frequently mobilize hundreds of thousands of people to take to the streets to challenge or protest Beijing's moves. Those were exactly the reasons why Beijing wanted to enact the 'anti-secession law.' Now our ruler still wants to use the same tactics to mobilize local people and thereby to 'counter-react' the 'anti-secession law.' Will the move add fuel to fire that he intends to put out or will he further mess up the situation because of mishandling? These are the questions that our ruler has to ponder. ."

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